

The team of the President of Belarus has, for the tenth time, won the Christmas International Amateur Ice Hockey Tournament for the Prize of the President of Belarus, with the hosts beating Finland in the finals, at Chizhovka-Arena — 7:3



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Holiday strengthens faith and makes life richer spiritually

Orthodox believers in Belarus celebrate Christian Christmas

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Sacred holiday of Christmas

Christmas symbolises people's hope and unity in the name of benevolence and kindness, reads the greeting of the Head of State, Alexander Lukashenko, to all Orthodox Christians of Belarus celebrating Christmas

By Alexander Pimenov

"This joyful holiday makes us happy, fills our hearts with love for those around us, and inspires us to make the world a better place. It embodies the

traditions of Orthodox Christianity and symbolises hope and unity for people in the name of benevolence, humanity, and kindness," reads the greeting. The President underlined that, in these turbulent times, these

values are the foundation of a peaceful and creative life essential for the wellbeing and prosperity of the country. "Let the festive mood of Christmas become an inexhaustible source of spiritual strength for work,

creativity, and communication with loved ones. We'll strive for accord and understanding. We'll look for that which unites us and will work together for the benefit of Belarus," noted Alexander Lukashenko.



Severe frost challenges



By Yevgeny Saveliev

Almost within a day the Axel cyclone has covered the country with a white veil increasing the snow cover by 5-10cm on average. Of course, it can't be compared with

last year's Daniella or 2013 Xavier. However, it provided a great deal of work for various services despite them receiving a warning from the Emergency Ministry in good time to start preparing in advance.

Road workers also met Axel

'fully armed'. Due to co-ordinated and intensive work it was possible to avoid jams and blockages on the roads, including in Minsk.

State Traffic Police have also strengthened their efforts. On the eve of the foul weather, they were

Minsk hit by severe frost

constantly warning drivers about the approaching cyclone and explained how to behave: to use special winter diesel fuel, strictly observe traffic rules and follow extraordinary security measures on the unpredictable winter roads.

New pension rules enter into force

Staged introduction of increased pension age launched on January 1st, raising retirement age for women to 58 years by 2022, with men working until the age of 63

By Tatiana Pastushenko

Representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, during an online conference, tell us more about:

Other changes

The decision governing the pension age will stand for the next six years, gradually rising. As to the long-term, it depends on how the demographic situation changes, as well as upon how the economy fares and how much is paid into the Public Social Protection Fund. Employment and migration are important.

Guarantees for older specialists

Security remains for workers of pre-pension age, and appropriate

changes have already been made to legislation. At the same time, many employers want to employ experts of older age, taking into account their experience, high level of qualifications and length of service.

Length of service for granting of pensions

We've made the decision to raise the minimum required length of service to twenty years of work, with obligatory payments, due to our aging population. The increase in general life expectancy and length of time for which people are drawing their pensions (nearly 20 years) makes this essential. However, in future, we may adjust the length of service required. Economically developed countries have established even more rigid requirements.



Savings

Considering the negative experience of other countries and conditions in Belarus, we have no plans to introduce an obligatory savings element into our state pension system. Insurance organisations offer voluntary programmes to 'top-up' the pension, and sav-

ings for old age can be arranged at banks.

Expected effects

The increase in pension age will allow us to avoid reducing the size of the pension, against the background of our aging population.

Real stimuli for long-term investments

By Vladimir Khromov

De-dollarisation of national economy to be completed within next two years, as envisaged by country's socio-economic development programme until 2020

By late 2018, the de-dollarisation of the economy should be complete, with foreign currency no longer used for transactions within Belarus, nor to set prices, duties, taxes, or other payments.

A corresponding decree by the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, released on the National Legal Internet Portal, states that the currency system is to undergo liberalisation. To achieve this, by 2018, the mandatory sale of foreign currency will be phased out step by step, and in 2018, restrictions on buying foreign currency for specific purposes will be lifted. Additionally, from 2020, restrictions will be lifted for opening accounts with foreign banks.

A flexible mechanism is planned to set the national currency exchange rate, while minimising the involvement of the National Bank in transactions on the currency market (the value of the basket of foreign currencies will be the guiding factor).

The goal is stability, as well as the expansion of gold and currency reserves to a safe level, enabling the country to maintain a sustainable situation on the currency market.

The major goal of our current monetary policy is the reduction of inflation, to 5 percent by late 2020. This will become a major condition for inspiring trust in the Belarusian Rouble and for reducing the cost of loans for legal entities and the public. Competition in the banking sector and the launch of modern technologies should help reduce costs and enhance the availability of banking services.

The refinancing rate is to become a base instrument for regulating interest rates. In 2017, the level of interest rates on new loans in national currency is to reach 17-19 percent per annum, falling in 2018 to 14-15 percent, and 11-12 percent by 2019, with a goal of 9-11 percent by 2020. This should stimulate production, long-term investments and the wider involvement of small and medium-sized businesses in the economy.

Words on peace, kindness and hope, voiced in church

President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, calls for unity between nations and within the Church, on visiting the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Minsk, to celebrate Orthodox Christmas

By Vasily Kharitonov

“We’re happy that, today, we’re together with our brotherly nations: Russians, Ukrainians, other nations and nationalities who live in our states,” the President said. “I spoke at the Synod about issues we must address, in the Church and the state. These have nothing to do with proposals to cut ties and separate. We shouldn’t do this. We need to stay calm and settle current matters while looking to the future, but not too far, of course. Otherwise, we may make mistakes, which would be inadmissible.”

Mr. Lukashenko noted that, at Christmas, people think a lot about eternal uniting values. “We always speak about moral virtues, and sources of spiritual strength. In this church, I’d like to mention another important value. It’s our Church, our main Christian Church. It has always been and, I hope, will remain, as the centre of unity. It is the main power uniting people, the nation, us,” he added.

In his words, Belarusian authorities view the Orthodox Church as a very good partner, supporting the ideas of the



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state, such as the restoration of holy places, the support of the family, morality, and cultural values. “The Church has always lent its shoulder to our people. It has always been at the epicentre of all important events,” the Head of State said.

Mr. Lukashenko believes that the pastoral word is vital

in our modern world, where individuals often find it difficult to find the right path, and to understand processes taking place around them. “Our Church is the most responsible Church in the world, the fairest and most sincere. Our Church has never told lies to our people. I should also note that we also have never given

reason for our Church to behave inappropriately,” the President noted.

The Belarusian President lit a Christmas candle by the Minsk icon of the Mother of God in the Holy Spirit Cathedral. He was welcomed there by the Metropolitan of Minsk and Zaslavl, Pavel, the Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus.

The Cathedral was also attended by representatives of the Orthodox brotherhood and sisterhood, as well as Sunday school students.

“I want this holiday to bring you peace, mutual understanding, prosperity and — importantly — realisation of all the wishes: if not all, then those related to your families,

friends and, especially, children,” the President declared, adding, “I’d like to address Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, our guests and all Christians with congratulations on this bright and solemn day. Merry Christmas to all of you! Live in peace and kindness!”

The President presented an icon of the Mother of God — Tender Feeling — to the Belarusian Orthodox Church: a reproduction of Malorita’s 15th century Tender Feeling icon, using the unique ancient wax tempera method.

Metropolitan Pavel presented the Iberian Mother of God icon (consecrated on Mount Athos) to the President, saying, “I wish that the Mother of God will bless our people, bless you — the head of this wonderful country and state, and strengthen your spiritual and physical strengths. May the Mother of God look after Belaya Rus and all our pious people. Let the new calendar year be peaceful and successful for all of us — a true blessing. As you always stress, this depends much on ourselves. We’ll pray and work and God’s blessing will remain with all of us,” Metropolitan Pavel said.

During the meeting with parishioners

Much seen from above in high resolution zoom

National Academy of Sciences of Belarus to launch creation of Belarusian space apparatus with high resolution for remote Earth sensing

By Vladimir Velikhov

During the presentation of the Year of Science in Belarus, the Head of Academy Staff of the National Academy of Sciences, academician Piotr Vityaz, told that in the last two years a new branch of science — space research — emerged in the country.

“We’ve created a system for Earth remote sensing for this kind of research. We’re now working to create a new remote sensing satellite with the 0.5 metre resolution. Our task this year is to start making it. We’ve already worked out engineering specifications and have signed the necessary

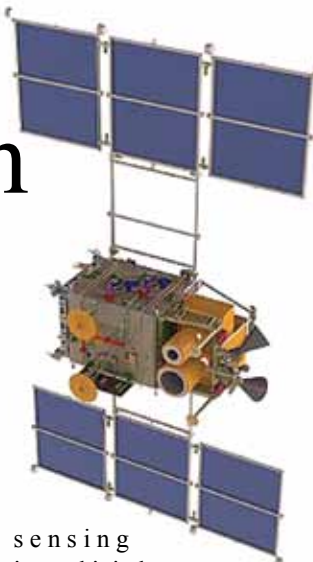
contracts,” noted Mr. Vityaz.

The official explained that the space data sent by the first satellite for Earth remote sensing is used by eleven Belarusian ministries.

“The operation of the BKA-1 satellite (Belarusian space apparatus) has been extended by two years and it has already been agreed with Roscosmos. Apart from that, together with the Belarusian State University we’ve created a nano-satellite that needs to be launched this year. It’s also necessary to create a control system. I think we’re going to do it together to use the satellite for educational and scientific purposes,” said Mr.

Vityaz.

The new satellite — BKA-2 — will be made using the manufacturing co-operation schemes that were utilised to make BKA-1. The Russian side will be represented by the VNIIEP Corporation (all-Russia Scientific-Research Institute of Electromechanics with Plant named after A.G. Iosifian). The core equipment will be made by Belarusian Peleng. The BKA-2 satellite will allow making topographic maps with the 1:10,000 scale. The product can then be used for various land cadastre tasks and our country plans to insert the second Belarusian space apparatus for Earth remote



sensing into orbit in late 2019.

It should be mentioned that the first Belarusian satellite for Earth remote sensing was successfully launched from the Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, on July 22nd, 2012, as part of a cluster of five satellites. At present BKA-1 provides space imagery for two dozen organisations, which are accountable to 11 Belarusian ministries, in addition to taking shots for a number of foreign customers.

No alternative to constructive dialogues

By Alexey Fedotov

Minsk remains key negotiating venue to settle Ukrainian crisis

According to an end of year report, Belarus’ foreign policy and the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2016 demonstrate that Belarus has made considerable efforts to promote a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Ukraine and provide necessary conditions for regular meetings of the trilateral contact group on Ukraine and its working groups. The November meeting of the foreign ministers of the ‘Normandy Four’, hosted by the Belarusian capital, demonstrated that Minsk remains a vital negotiating platform for

Ukraine crisis settlement.

Belarus has helped counter modern challenges and threats, taking an active part in United Nations’ activities, and those of other international organisations. The Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasises the timely initiative of the Belarusian Head of State to launch a new, large-scale negotiating format, similar to the Helsinki Process, to discuss relations between the East and the West.

“Comprehensive efforts have helped improve the international image of our country and how it’s perceived within the international arena. Now, Belarus is rightfully appreciated as a ‘point of stability’ in the region,” the report reads.

Free economic zones maintain relevance and competitive advantages in early 2017, despite rules changing slightly regarding residents' supply to Eurasian Economic Union market, notes President, at meeting in late December 2016

By Vladimir Khromov

Initially, residents of Belarusian free economic zones enjoyed some custom preferences regarding export supplies (none for domestic sales). However, since the establishment of the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, partner countries share a common market. Accordingly, customs preferences are being removed from January 1st, 2017, for all products sold from free economic zones to the EAEU.

The difficulty is that many free economic zone residents initially focused their sales on states which, over time, have become EAEU partners. Free economic zones operate in Russia and Kazakhstan and the elimination of customs preferences has been compensated for with tax benefits: a path Belarus is now aiming to follow. However, our budget potential differs, since Belarus lacks income from sale of raw materials. Business cir-

Free economic zones



Clear and simple rules for business



BelEmsa, a resident of the Mogilev free economic zone

cles have debated how to proceed: should we lift some privileges to replace them with others? Can we allow conditions of activity to differ between EAEU member countries?

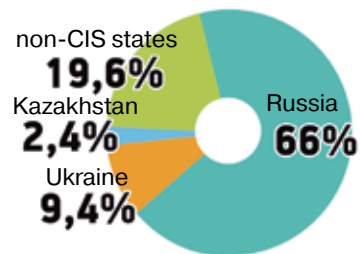
The President began the meeting by saying, "In the tough struggle to find investors, our free economic zones shouldn't lose competitiveness within the Eurasian Economic Union. Conditions for their functioning within the EAEU market

should be at least equal."

The Government has prepared relevant proposals, which have been approved by the President, as Economy Minister Vladimir Zinovskiy explains. He comments that tax preferences should compensate for lost customs privileges by about 60 percent.

The Chairman of Santa Bremor's Board (which is a Brest free economic zone resident), Alexander Moshenskiy, notes that this

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measure is sufficient to preserve competitiveness on traditional markets.

Another issue, of no less importance, deals with the efficiency of the Entrepreneurship Development Council, which oversees such matters. There are many acute business-related issues. The Council needs to generate ideas to improve the business and investment climate in the country, preparing ways to solve problems, in a fashion acceptable to the state and businesses. The country needs an effective business climate, with comfortable conditions and jobs with worthy salaries.

Deal finished to buy Atlant Telecom

By Alexey Fedosov

International Holding Telekom Austria Group, owning mobile operator Velcom, purchases 100 percent of shares in statutory fund of Atlant Telecom and daughter company Teleset, from Zubr Capital Private Equity Firm and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

"There is no plan to change the Atlant Telecom brand; the legal independence of the company will be preserved, and all obligations to subscribers will be fully met," notes Velcom's Deputy Director General for Fixed Connection and Integration, and Atlant Telecom's Director, Anton Bladik. He explains that, together with Velcom, Atlant Telecom will continue to construct the Ethernet network in Minsk and across regional centres. At present, specialists from both companies are studying scenarios for developing infrastructure and connection of new users.

The quality of fixed Internet services, and others, is to be enhanced, via technology transfer from Velcom and by unifying resources. "Change will only be for the better. Velcom will be directing efforts towards maximum convenience for Atlant Telecom customers, across all cities where it has a presence," adds Velcom's top manager.



Atlant Telecom's experience will help the Velcom mobile operator to develop fixed Internet for individuals and legal entities. "Expertise accumulated over years of work will find application during further construction of the fixed network and connection of new subscribers. Velcom and Atlant Telecom will continue developing and gradually moving closer towards each other, while joint work will become more efficient, through sharing experience. Undoubtedly, this will be felt by our clients across all regions of Belarus," adds Mr. Bladik.

Atlant Telecom currently has 126,000 fixed communication subscribers, and 49,000 cable television subscribers. It is Belarus' largest private provider, developing fixed broadband access to Internet, IPTV and cable television. Velcom has more than a thousand legal entities and around 170 business centres as clients, connected to its fixed Internet services. It's expected that Telekom Austria Group's purchase of Atlant Telecom will inspire the development of fixed communication in Belarus.

Spending loans wisely

By Valeria Gavrushcheva

World creditors know our country to be punctual in paying its debts, having repaid just over \$3bn annually over the past four years! This year will be no exception.

There's no stigma in taking out a loan; it's common practice these days. According to the Finance Ministry, state debt stands at around 35.5bn denominated Roubles (38.8 percent of GDP). In some countries, this exceeds 100 of GDP (even reaching 200 percent of GDP). In effect, even selling the country's entire assets would be insufficient to repay the debt.

Interestingly, some of the globe's most successful states are the biggest borrowers: Japan, Belgium, and

Singapore. Liberal Club economist Anton Boltochko explains, "When loans are spent on development and growth of production, they're useful. If creditors see that the economic system is stable and GDP is rising, they feel confident that loans will be repaid. This allows such countries to continue borrowing, even if state debt is high."

Belarus has plenty of 'buffer', although state debt is rising as a proportion of GDP. Mr. Boltochko adds, "Researchers assess debt position as a percentage of GDP in various ways, usually agreeing 60-80 percent of GDP to be critical. Much depends on economic structure but it's necessary to understand that, when we spend a definite percentage of GDP on repaying debts, we sacrifice future GDP growth."

The Government has forecast 1.5 percent GDP growth for 2017. New loans are being partially spent on repaying previous loans and for technological renovation of branches of the economy. The Government's strategy is clear: money should work for the benefit of the economy.

Industrial giants have been modernised and much money has been injected into agriculture. Over the past five years, more than a thousand dairy farms have been re-equipped. Belarus now accounts for about 5 percent of global exports of dairy produce.

Yuri Silvestrov, Belarus' Dep-



uty Finance Minister, tells us, "We expect to attract \$1.9bn, to pay off the principal portion of state debt, primarily, via three tranches from the Eurasian Fund for Stabilisation and Development (worth \$700m). Meanwhile, \$800m of Eurobonds are to be released and about \$360m is to be attracted from the release of internal state obligations. Moreover, the budget for 2017 has been adopted with a surplus of \$1.5bn, which will be used to repay state debt, meeting the obligations of the Government."

Assessing sofa seminars

Lessons online are convenient, letting us define our schedule and venue

By Veronika Artemieva

‘What’s a Webinar?’ most of our students would ask. Electronic education is yet to hit Belarus, even though we’re all familiar with laptops, tablets, smart phones, and the Internet. Electronic education involves so much more than simply the use of multimedia: electronic blackboards and Powerpoint presentations. Clearly, we have some learning to do.

Victoria Verameichik and Anna Mikhalenko, second-year students at the Belarusian State Pedagogical University (named after Maxim Tank), have been surveying pupils, students and teachers, as part of their *Didactics of Network Lessons* project. They’ve asked about attitudes towards electronic education, how often people use the Internet and for what purpose, how information-communication technologies are being developed in the school environment, and attitudes towards information technologies, including how they could influence the future role of teachers.

Anna Mikhalenko tells us, “When we discussed using information technologies in education, for example, network lessons and lectures, opinions were divided. Though, of course, ‘pros’ prevailed. Why? Because lessons using information technologies are convenient: you can choose



Webinars and Internet conferences gaining in popularity

your schedule and venue. Almost 60 percent of respondents singled out this possibility.

There are also other advantages. Network lessons aren’t simply recorded lessons; you can see and hear a teacher, while the teacher sees and hears you. Almost 50 percent of men liked the idea, which allows education from any location, including from other continents. 26 percent of respondents showed interest in lectures by foreign teachers, all enjoyed from the comfort of the sofa or armchair.”

A few disadvantages

were also mentioned: fears that technologies deprive us of live dialogue, that children’s socialisation could be jeopardised; that remote learning cannot cover the same ground as traditional methods; and that online teaching cannot allow for the same degree of question asking.

Almost every establishment of higher education now offers remote learning, enabling individual students to gain access. However, network lessons are intended for large attendance, making them something new.

The Belarusian State Ped-

agogical University (named after Maxim Tank) uses a network to offer study with the Physics and Mathematics Department. Its Social-Pedagogical Technologies

Department (which predominantly enrolls women) is yet to launch such classes, but that may yet change.

Victoria Verameichik tells us, “The department

has opened a resource centre of electronic materials, allowing for remote learning via online lectures and online conferences.”

Students are keen to see more lessons and subject offered online, allowing them to interact with other people and to keep abreast of innovations, helping in self-development.

The system could also be used for teachers to chat with pupils’ parents: very useful for those unable to attend meetings in person. Victoria adds, “In our work, such communication is vital. I’d willingly use it, especially if I worked in the countryside. It would allow me to consult with other teachers and debate issues online.”

Other students agree that electronic education offers possibilities. The full benefits of the Internet are far from being utilised. In truth, many only use it for entertainment. “There’s such potential!” Anna asserts. “If we use the Internet for education and development, we’ll be more effective.”

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The market for online educational services is growing steadily. The Teacher Training Department of Texas University, in El Paso (USA), conducts around half of its basic educational courses online. Many of the world’s leading universities are doing so, creating a consortium of remote learning courses, initiating special programmes of support and carrying out online courses, as well as developing new tools for online educational systems. Sceptics say that such distance learning cannot replace traditional learning. The Gallup Institute’s interview of the heads of several American universities showed that 54 percent of participants somewhat disagreed or were unsure that such courses promoted a creative teaching strategy. Moreover, 83 percent disagreed or were unsure regarding online courses’ ability to improve education for all students.

Among top five trending apps

By Leonid Gromov

MSQRD, developed by Belarusian programmers, among top five trending mobile apps of 2016, according to Google

The MSQRD application is ranked fifth, behind Face Changer 2, Lumyer Photo & Selfie Editor, Castbox Podcast Radio Music, and Emoji Keyboard Pro.

Google has compiled lists of the most popular content for 2016 worldwide, covering games, films, TV programmes, music and books.

The most popular games include Pokemon GO, Clash Royale, Traffic Rider, slither.io, and Dream League Soccer while the top five films include several inspired by comics: *Deadpool*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*,



MSQRD developers Eugene Nevgen and Sergei Gonchar

Zootopia, *Captain America: Civil War*, and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. Meanwhile, the top five TV

shows are *Game of Thrones*, *The Walking Dead*, *Big Bang Theory*, *Mr. Robot*, and *Flash*.

Treating wounds with special bandages

By Yulia Vasilishina

Winners of 7th Republican Contest of Innovative Projects announced in Minsk

Innovations in the field of medicine, IT and education led at the event, noted the Chairman of the State Science and Technology Committee, Alexander Shumilin. He underlined that the number of applications has quadrupled since 2010, to over 170, while each is of higher quality, including serious business plans for launch onto the market.

The development taking first prize was the perfect illustration: special bandages for treating wounds, called ‘Chitomed’, using chitosan nanofibres to aid healing. A senior lecturer of the Chair of

Surgical Diseases, at Grodno Medical University, Vladimir Melamed, announced, “Chitosan is a natural biopolymer with remarkable medicinal properties. Our bandages are intended for treating major trophic ulcers and burns, as well as scratches and cuts. The bandage contains chitosan nanofibres, which are 200-300 times thinner than a human hair.”

He explained that a division of local Svetlogorsk Synthetic Fibres Plant, SvetlogorskKhimvolokno, is undertaking manufacture of the innovation. The first experimental batch of ‘Chitomed’ bandages was produced at the Mineral Wax Plant JSC, but Mr. Melamed tells us that a whole line is planned, using available technologies.

Proper time to gather stones

By Uliana Bushui

The Chinese-Belarusian Centre for Commercialising Innovations has opened in Minsk, promoting sci-tech and innovative projects, and helping locate investors for joint production within the

Great Stone Industrial Park. The Chairman of the State Science and Technology Committee, Alexander Shumilin, attended the launch, alongside the First Deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences, Sergey Chizhik,

and the Chief Executive Officer of the Industrial Park Development Company, Hu Zheng.

Mr. Chizhik reminded everyone that the Great Stone Industrial Park aims to support high-tech production and high-tech innovations.

He asserted, “Over the coming year, we’ll be working to create the infrastructure for our Year of Science.”

Hu Zheng named the attraction of innovative manufacturing as a top priority, to enhance the level of the Industrial Park.

History receives no peace!

Children and adults engage with our past

Belarus gains a new military-historical club almost monthly, each with its own focus of interest: from Vikings to war in Afghanistan.

By Kristina Khilko

‘The Minsk Infantry Regiment’ has been on the battlefields for twenty years, reviving events from the Great Patriotic War of 1812. Club member Yuri Skarulis admits that they borrowed the idea from one in Germany, in the late 1980s. He says, “Similar clubs were wildly popular abroad, while for us they were unusual. We read a lot of literature and were the first to create a similar club in Belarus.” Enthusiasts originally created their own uniforms, with help from the sewing shop at Minsk Bearing Plant. Today, most go to simple tailoring shops, which are now adept at such work.

“Hundreds of fighters, true cavalry, guns... most people who participate in reconstruction, fall in love with the idea for ever,” the association’s leader, Sergey Vileiko, assures us.

‘The Minsk Infantry Regiment’ is so famous that it has been invited to a festival on the island of Corsica, where Napoleon was imprisoned.

Fifty soldiers and officers are to form the regiment, while ladies will go as vivandieres. To join, you need to be recommended by two members of the regiment, and your candidacy is then



approved at a general meeting. The recruit is given a year to tailor a uniform and purchase armaments.

Full scale reconstructions in Belarus include knightly tournaments in Novogrudok, Mir, Nesvizh,

Fights devoted to events of 1812 were arranged in November, at famous Brilevskoe Field, near Berezina

Minsk and Mstislavl while First World War events are held regularly in Smorgon and Ivatsevichi.

Sew, gallop and forge armour

Re-enactors master several ancient trades which are useful even today

Many Belarusian clubs address the culture of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which existed in the territory of modern Belarus and Lithuania. Club ‘Lucern’ promotes the traditions of Switzerland, from the second half of the 14th century, where the army comprised mostly infantry. However, it’s not so simple to become even a common infantryman. “Being a re-enactor involves knowing a great deal and being strong,

since you need to be fit for the activities,” says Andrey Frolov, a leader in his club. “Meanwhile, the price of ‘medieval’ equipment can amount to several thousand Dollars.” Members tend to be jacks of all trades, spinning chain armour, forging, sewing by hand and so on. Those in the cavalry must become good equestrians, and all must learn military strategy. Belarus has some of the most skilful swordsmen, who often win foreign tournaments and make a name for themselves at festivals.

Too bad, Chagall!

Pages from artist’s diary from his third year at school posted online, to encourage pupils doing less well

The list of famous people who performed poorly at school features not only the Belarusian artist but Beethoven, Napoleon, Churchill and Einstein. Staff from the National Historical Archive of Belarus have posted the rare document from his schooldays, at Vitebsk’s College #1, on Facebook. There is little information about this period of his life. In 1898, 11-year-old Movsha Chagall became a first year pupil (having been previously taught at home). Seven years later, he graduated but, until recently, there was no information on his grades.

Chagall failed to demonstrate excellent results in the 1903-1904 academic year, receiving ‘3’ in most subjects, including geometry, history, science and geography. His knowledge of Russian language and arithmetic was given a ‘4’.

Interestingly, Chagall was modestly graded in drawing as well — receiving ‘4’. Only his behaviour was perfect, gaining a ‘5’.

Despite these low grades, Chagall was allowed to move to the next academic year, as confirmed by the ‘council’, although the move aroused dispute. National Historical Archive staff tell us, “We’re witnessing hot debate, as if the document had only been discovered recently. In fact, the diary was exhibited in 2012, when Marc Chagall’s 125th birthday was celebrated.”

Parents of modern children seem delighted by the diary, and social network posts abound with statements urging children to persevere, regardless of grades. Obviously, there’s more to success than top marks. Those who appear to lack talent, may just be late developers.

Novel, story, poetry and collection, with autographs

Books signed by Belarusian authors on sale in Minsk

By Svetlana Povtorova

Belarusian writers with Registr Publishing House are taking part in an author signing session at the Tsentralny bookstore in Minsk, as part of a campaign promoting book purchases. On the eve of the New Year, it’s always pleasant to buy a book, either as a gift, or for yourself. Such purchases are even more special when

you receive a signed edition, from the author.

Igor Polyakov, the author of *The Space*, began his career as a director but won a literary contest for emerging authors, *The First Chapter*, in 2012, which launched his debut novel.

Oksana Khvashchevskaya won the second season of *The First Chapter*; her book, *Not Love*, became a

best-seller almost overnight, thrilling readers with its palette of emotions. Her female protagonist’s anxieties, sufferings and joys are brought to life as vividly as if we’re watching on film. Fans can acquire a signed copy from Oksana herself, at the Tsentralny bookstore.

Tamara Lisitskaya’s *The Goddess or the Housewife’s Lament* was her first poetry collection, released in



During autograph session

2014, following on the heels of her other books with Registr Publishing House: *Female Women Idiots*, *The*

Quiet Centre, and *The Stork’s Kiss*. Ms. Lisitskaya has worked as a TV and radio host, a director and a writer.

Bold knight's move

Vladimir Azarko meets a lot of children, having driven a school bus for the past decade, which serves nearly ten villages in the Verkhnedvinsk District

By Sergey Muravsky

Covering 150km daily, he's learnt how to remain relaxed, smiling at childish pranks. Some years ago, Vladimir set up an agro-estate in his native village of Yustiyanovo, buying horses, so that he could offer children rides, free of charge.

Vladimir meets me near his gate, telling me that his 'payment' for the horse rides is the promotion of happiness, rather than money.

In the backyard, behind the fence, I can see horses chomping at the bit: restive Nora, white Chaika, and obstinate Kamysh. The quietest is Zorka, who recently turned twenty years old. Local children know his six horses well, as do adults. Vladimir and his animals take part in local events around Verkhnedvinsk: for Maslenitsa (Pancake Week) and City Day.

Three years ago, a girl with walking problems visited from Novopolotsk. Her parents had been trying hippotherapy with her for a long time, at various schools and estates, but it was only with Vladimir's horses that she gained an emotional connection.

Vladimir's story of how he came to create the agro-estate is unusual, as he had no business plan and had no expectation of earning an income. Nearly ten years ago, after moving to Yustiyanovo, he bought a horse — to plough his kitchen garden, and to ride in the forest. The horse was, simply, a pet. However, Vladimir felt he

wanted more. His only son had long since grown up, and had moved to distant Nesvizh.

Vladimir had kept horses since childhood, his parents having had a large farm, so it was natural for him to want them. Yustiyanovo children would often ask Vladimir if they could ride his horse, as he went by. Villagers say that he's too kind to refuse the youngsters. He'd put aside his own schedule, to help them ride for hours.

In due course, Vladimir acquired a pair of other horses, just for fun. One was malnourished and unwell, requiring nursing for several months, like a sick child. He spent many days and nights at the veterinary in the village who helped cure the horse. Meanwhile, the estate received more and more guests.

His friends suggested that he officially register his agro-estate, to enable him to charge for riding. The district doesn't have any riding schools, the nearest being fifty kilometres away, in Osveya. The situation is favourable for Vladimir, although it took time for his business to become successful. He simply lacked the true business spirit, wishing to encourage youngsters, regardless of their parents' ability to pay. He tells us, "We're in a village, where salaries are small. Children and their parents can't afford such entertainments."

Vladimir charges a suggested voluntary donation of Br50 Kopecks; it can elicit only a smile in



MT REFERENCE

Each horse is unique in character. To communicate with them, you need the inclinations of a zoologist, veterinary doctor and, even, a psychologist. However, Vladimir recognises that he can't compare with a professional groom.

comparison with other riding schools.

A Chinese restaurant who introduced the same voluntary payments, allowing customers to pay whatever they thought was fair, went bust within three months. Vladimir, by and large, observes the same principle but his business has been operational for three years. He still offers free rides, despite having costs to meet. A single collar for a horse costs Br700 Roubles, while a saddle is even more expensive. However, Vladimir stresses that his work feeds his soul, and that his horses are healthy. He's convinced that the work keeps him young."

Horses need to be cared for, their harnesses repaired, and forage provided for winter. Meanwhile, each is unique in character. To communicate with them, you need the inclinations of a zoologist, veterinary doctor and, even, a psychologist.

Vladimir is

learning these skills gradually, but recognises that he still can't compare with a professional groom. "If a horse wiggles its ears, it indicates that it's disturbed. A toss of the head shows irritation, while refusal to eat indicates illness. Luckily, my local vet is very helpful."

Vladimir has no plans to buy more horses, but won't say that it'll never happen. He'll help a horse in need. He currently offers rides in his home-made carriage or on horseback, takes riders through the forest, and shows them the sights. Naturally, he needs to know what he's talking about, and follow health and safety regulations. It's one thing to lead a horse by the bridle while a child sits in the saddle, but another to allow the child to take independent control. Vladimir is kind and sympathetic but also very responsible.

He doesn't have a business plan for rendering extra services and some villagers do make fun of him, but Vladimir shrugs off those comments. One year ago, Ilze Stabulniece, the Chair of the Latvian Office of Euroregion 'Country of Lakes', who owns a well-known horse estate, visited Yustiyanovo. Ilze praised Vladimir's care of his horses, and discussed plans for developing horse tourism. He offered co-operation, so perhaps Vladimir's kindness will be repaid.



Vladimir Azarko keen on horses

Find Your Belarus — edition for tourists

By Olga Korneeva

National Tourism Agency releases new brochures dedicated to Belarus

The National Tourism Agency will distribute the brochures at various international tourist fairs in 2017, as well as through diplomatic missions in Belarus. The edition is offered in eight languages: Russian, Polish, German, English, French, Chinese, Arabic and Hebrew.

"We've involved the design agency and young Belarusian photographers in creating the brochures. So many people have been engaged in creating this booklet, which aims to show the tranquility and purity of Belarus, as well as its relaxed, cosy atmosphere, as often noted by tourists to Belarus. Tourist exhibitions are held in major cities, where people are keen to seek out destinations like Belarus, where they can 'get away from it all'. We're aiming to show Belarus to potential tourists, promoting our country to foreign markets in the new year," notes Irina Gordienko, the Head of the National Tourism Agency's Marketing Department.

Travel without need of a visa

By Yulia Iosifova

Guests from the USA, Ireland and Macedonia can already visit Grodno without a visa. Tourists arrive from all over the globe, with ever more nationalities venturing to Belarus, aided by the launch of a visa-free regime for foreign citizens visiting the Avgustovsky Canal and neighbouring territories. So far, tourists from twenty-one countries have been registered, and around 2,000 foreigners have used a special permission document. Many more have made plans for coming trips.

Tatiana Lidyaeva, the Deputy Head of the Sports and Tourism Department for Grodno Regional Executive Committee, notes, "The Old Castle, and the New Castle, alongside museums, enjoy popularity among tourists, while groups from Poland eagerly visit the House-Museum of Eliza Orzeszkowa. Alongside excursions, tourists also enjoy promenading the city's historical centre. Youngsters enjoy Grodno clubs, where night life is humming, while local agro-estates are popular among the elder generation."

Tourists had the chance to make a visa-free trip to the territory of the special tourist and recreational park, Avgustovsky Canal, in late October, staying up to five days, residing within the park and the neighbouring settlements of Gozha, Koptevka, Odelsk, Podlabenie and Sopotskin rural councils, of the Grodno Region, as well as in the city of Grodno.



Snowfall in Istanbul

Glacial conditions cause death and disruptions

Heavy snow storms and glacial weather across a large area of Europe have brought unusual landscapes to some Mediterranean countries and caused disruption, hardship and casualties

In Italy at least seven people — five of them homeless — were reported to have died in a 48-hour period. The snow has hit some areas already badly damaged by last year's earthquakes, with temperatures plunging to minus 10 degrees Celsius.

Several ferry links were cut off the southern Italian coast. More snow was forecast over the rest of the weekend. Further north the Vatican has not been immune. The fountains of St. Peter's Square were turned into

frozen blocks of ice — providing at least some pretty pictures for tourists.

In Turkey heavy snow blocked hundreds of roads in the east. Istanbul woke to a whiteout after heavy snowfall overnight. Hundreds of flights in and out of the city's airports were cancelled on Friday and Saturday. More snow was expected in the coming days. "For sure snow is nice but if it snows in Istanbul, life stops. The roads are bad, especially the small roads where traffic is really bad and cars can't drive," said one

woman in Turkey's largest city.

In Poland where homeless shelters are full, seven people died of hypothermia during the coldest night of the winter so far, as temperatures dropped to nearly 30 below zero. Saturday night was also very cold.

Elsewhere in eastern Europe two Iraqi migrants were found frozen to death in Bulgaria on Friday. The body of a 20-year-old Afghan who had crossed from Turkey was discovered in northern Greece. With tens of thousands of Syrian refu-

gees on its territory, the country has moved many to heated shelters.

The countries of the Balkans are also suffering from extremely low temperatures, especially in the mountainous regions of Bosnia and in southern and eastern Serbia. Meanwhile Moscow was experiencing its coldest Orthodox Christmas for 120 years.

At the origin of the freezing conditions is air from the Arctic sweeping south from Scandinavia into central Europe.

Harrods: protest over waiters' tips at landmark London store

Saturday was a busy old day at Harrods — but for all the wrong reasons as far as the luxury department store is concerned

A protest outside the shop's entrance brought together disgruntled restaurant staff, complaining that up to 75 percent of the tips they receive in one of London's best-known landmarks are being kept by its Qatari owner.

As unions and anti-austerity activists raise the prospect of industrial action, Harrods is quoted as saying staff are paid 'fairly' and above the UK's national living wage.

Economic optimism in the Eurozone despite political uncertainty

Economic sentiment in the Eurozone was much better than expected in December thanks to more optimism in France, Germany and the Netherlands

The European Commission's monthly survey showed economic sentiment and the business climate indicator at their highest since March and June 2011 respectively. It matched strong data this week from purchasing managers and signs of an uptick in inflation. That suggests vibrant business activity in the Eurozone at the turn of the year despite increased political uncertainties.

"The Eurozone has started the year on a positive note," ING economist Bert Colijn said.



Beijing to set up police squad to combat smog

Beijing is to set up a new police division to crack down on activities harming the environment

It comes amid a period of heavy smog in the Chinese capital and other regions in the country. State media say the government plans to phase out hundreds of thousands of high-polluting vehicles, and close hundreds of factories as

well as the city's only coal-fired power plant.

Beijing's Deputy Communist Party Chief and Acting Mayor Cai Qi said the environmental police force would tackle illegal practices — including open air barbecues and rubbish incineration where standards were not met.

"Through these measures, we plan to cut coal consump-

tion by 30 percent year on year, to less than seven million tons," the Acting Mayor told a media briefing.

Recently the authorities in many Chinese cities, including Beijing, extended an orange alert — the second-highest level — for heavy air pollution. Schools and other institutions have been ordered to stop outdoor activities.

Turkey's tourism industry takes a hit amid security concerns

The streets of Istanbul, normally full of tourists, have seen a dramatic drop in foreign visitors

Turkey's tourism industry has taken a hit after a failed coup and a string of deadly terrorist attacks in 2016. In the latest — a massacre of mainly foreign tourists at an Istanbul night club on New Year's Eve — 39 people were killed. It was followed days later by a car bombing outside the main courthouse in Izmir, Turkey's third largest city.

The continued security threats are a big concern for the country where tourism makes up five percent of GDP and represents around eight percent of the workforce.

"It's the easiest way to hurt the economy," explained Yasemin Pirinçioğlu, the head of travel agency VIP Event. "This is not war like it used



to be, it's a different war, it's an the cities war type of thing, so this is why they hit tourism first," she added.

In 2016, visitor numbers slumped by almost 30 per cent.

Not everyone is put off by security concerns. One tourist from Ukraine told a reporter that there is unrest in the world, noting that people

say the same about her city in Ukraine being close to the front line, but she decided to visit Turkey anyway.

However, many more are staying away. The figures look stark for 2017. Even before the night club shooting on New Year's Eve, number of foreign visitors was expected to fall by a further 22 percent.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies



Exhibition at National Art Museum arouses unusual level of interest

Artworks now more accessible

National Art Museum of Belarus displays first major exhibition of two painters — Mikhail Sevruc and Piotr Sergievich — from domestic collections

By Veniamin Mikheev

For a long time, Mikhail Sevruc and Piotr Sergievich remained in the shadow of famous colleagues. Only recently have they claimed a place in the constellation of classical painters of Belarusian art. Now, they have a place at the National Art Museum.

In Soviet times, Vilno School graduates Sevruc and Sergievich were rarely invited to exhibitions. No one wrote about them or dedicated books to them. The Vilno School was considered non-Soviet at that time, and the two artists knew no popularity. They lived on the territory of Western Belarus until 1939.

Mikhail Sevruc studied under People's Artist of Belarus Lev Gumilevsky, and lived most of his life in Nesvizh. Nesvizh's Local History Museum boasts over a thousand of his works.

The current exhibition showcases almost two hundred pictures little known even to art experts, having been kept in family collections for dozens of years. Many have been seen only by a handful of art lovers. The exhibition at the National Art Museum features works from seventeen Belarusian collectors, including sketches and canvases purchased back in Soviet times.

Piotr Sergievich has spent most of his life in Vilno, though was born in the Vitebsk Region of Belarus. He's visited Minsk only a few times, so his legacy has remained primarily in Lithuania and, partially, in Poland.

Meanwhile, his monumental works have remained forever in their homeland, thanks to his paintings inside Roman Catholic churches. The current exhibition displays the sketches for his frescoes.

Interestingly, all the pieces

on show — graphic and pictorial — come from private rather than museum collections. Everyone knows that art comes to life when cherished. Artists usually avow that they create artworks for their own pleasure but we also know that they enjoy receiving public recognition. They delight to hear sighs of admiration, to see people elevate their eyebrows, whisper, and gaze mute. As we know, artists' works continue to bring pleasure long after their deaths.

Thanks to domestic collectors, we can admire works by Mikhail Sevruc and Piotr Sergievich. Due to their efforts, works by these Belarusian painters haven't been lost to foreign collections, or mouldered in attics or in cellars. We should be grateful to our collectors, who are now enabling us to share in the exhibits.

169 graphic pieces and canvases hang on the museum walls, telling a particular story. Bringing them together has been a story in itself, since it's no easy task to co-ordinate an exhibition on this scale, tracing works which date, often, back to the 1930s and 1940s, and which have found homes around the world.

Though art experts name Piotr Sergievich and Mikhail Sevruc as masters of the Vilno School, they differ greatly, united perhaps only by their love for their native land, for its muted landscapes, its people, its trees and its history.

Mikhail Sevruc has a typical artist's biography, having depicted what he loved and



M. Sevruc. *Maple in Autumn*. 1968

viewed as beautiful. His works remind us of classical art from the Renaissance and Classical periods.

Mr. Sergievich didn't find popular recognition until the 1980s. He was viewed as a Lithuanian artist rather than Belarusian, and was labelled as a 'nationalist'. Today, his artworks can be found in the permanent collection of the National Art Museum and his talents are properly recognised. Piotr Sergievich loved Belarus and its people, creating grand works dedicated to Kastus Kalinovsky and Frantsisk Sko-



M. Sevruc. *Rest*. Sketch. 1967

rina. He created a series of canvases devoted to Yanka Kupala's creativity, and a portrait gallery of famous Belarusians. He also painted inside Roman Catholic churches and created icons.

Undoubtedly, the painting of Western Belarus is an important page in our national culture, and one not yet fully studied. The diversity of genres and styles, high professionalism, and the way in which they reveal truths of people's lives (as Sergievich and Sevruc were both concerned with) make these works of considerable significance within the

Belarusian School. Mr. Sergievich's creativity reflects its time: the beauty of nature and the distinctiveness of Belarusian culture. His canvases show each person as he or she is. His romantic works inspired the nation in its struggle for liberation, while such canvases as *An Oarsman* and *Adolescence* are of public and national significance. Mr. Sergievich understood his duty to remind us of our glorious past and our legacy, as explored in his *Vseslav Polotsky, Kalinovsky and Vrublevsky during Inspection of Rebels*.

The painter created a whole range of canvases dedicated to

the life of Belarusian peasants: *Transportation of Construction Cargo through Bogmy Lake, At the Spinning Wheel, Life, Wedding in Belorussiya, A Plowman, A Blacksmith Forges a Horse, and Belarusians*. His *Road of Life*, also known as *Along the Road*, is an emotional composition, showing with rare truthfulness the despair of a landless peasant. In the 1930s, Mr. Sergievich drew portraits of his contemporaries: *Mikhas Mashara, Belarusian Teacher, Rygor Shirma and Zabeida-Sumitsky*.

His contemplations about art, published in 1936, are both interesting and informative: 'After a long decline, the Belarusian nation is rising, to demonstrate its spiritual power, while finding ancient traditions and new roads in all branches of folk creativity... One of the brightest branches is painting. Belarusians who studied science in other schools, in eastern or western parts of our land, should remember that, in order not to break ties with the nation and not to lose the orientation of the eastern or western school, it's necessary to know yourself'.

Undoubtedly, Mikhail Sevruc was a bright and original painter with a unique world outlook and perception among artists in Western Belarus.

Like many of his colleagues, after graduating from Vilno University's Art Department, he took whatever orders came his way: the painting of a Roman Catholic church in Vilno, and painting signs. Being a painter by education and vocation, he refused to give up. His landscapes reflect the beauty, richness, warmth and attractiveness of Belarusian nature, as we see in *Bathers, Run, Near the Well, In the Field, and Peasant Life*.

Juozas Budraitis: 'Happiness cannot be purchased...'

Outstanding Lithuanian actor is a frequent visitor to Belarus and he has recently performed his *Krapp's Last Tape* monologue at International Theatre Forum *Teart*

By Tatiana Orlova

Cinematic success

Juozas, you come to Minsk several times a year, although you've never worked with Belarusfilm before...

Recently, I acted in a film directed by young Alexandra Butor, called 'Vera's Sweet Farewell'. I've brought my monologue, 'Krapp's Last Tape', invited by director Oskaras Koršunovas, who is one of my favourites. The role is intense and serious, as a lonely person assesses his life, in which nothing has gone well.

Your own life has been absolutely different.

In half a century of stage and screen work, I've played many roles, and have met the most interesting people. I recently acted in 'Garden of Eden', directed by Algimantas Puipa, which has been interesting. It features many veterans of the cinema and theatre, so we have plenty to talk about, recalling the past.

Writing memoirs

Tell us about your memoir, *My Cinema: the World of Men*, published recently.

It's the first serious work I've done in my role as a Counsellor for Culture, with the Lithuanian Embassy to Russia, based in Moscow. I didn't want to lose momentum. However, the book isn't a memoir. Authors of memoirs don't tend to write the absolute truth, rather giving a subjective view. Instead of revealing information about myself, I wanted to write about the history of cinema. The most interesting pages are about film director Vytautas Žalakevičius, who brought me into the world of cinema. He was a person of incredible erudition and intelligence, a true creator. We have very few such people. I'm happy that Fate gave me

the chance to work with him.

It all began with the legendary film 'Nobody Wanted to Die'. When it was released, everyone acting in the film was in great demand.

You acted in almost all of his films. *This Sweet Word — Freedom* still has relevance today...

It's valuable from a stylistic point of view, and explores the timeless theme of our struggle against violence and injustice. I played Felisio. Žalakevičius really challenged us, requiring me, in the role, to berate myself, disclosing every innermost thought. Felisio is a hero of few words. It really taught me a great deal; I consider it to demonstrate the height of my acting powers.

The role influenced my further work. In the Soviet years, I chose roles unconnected with ideology. One famous director offered me the role of Dzerzhinsky but how could I agree, when my own family members had been killed during the years of Soviet repression?

Hobby as second profession

Your own photos illustrate the book, showing celebrities in unusual situations. Last year, the *Listapad* Minsk Film Festival hosted an exhibition of your photos.

My first photo exhibition was held at the Moskva cinema house. It was the start of my career as a photographer. I took pictures during film shoots, wanting to keep them as souvenirs for when I was old, to remember all those people with whom I'd worked. At Moskva cinema house, there were about twenty portraits of colleagues, and then seventy more at another exhibition, at Mosfilm. I took the exhibition on tour across various cities, in Russia and Belarus. It reached Vilnius only

three years ago. By the way, my exhibition 'Borders and People' opened in Helsinki recently.

Your portrait of your beautiful wife, Vita, always attracts attention at your exhibitions.

Vita is very beautiful; therefore, I constantly photograph her.

Your son, Martin, is following in your footsteps.

He's the Director of the National Drama Theatre, and acts in films. Martin chose the profession himself, without my input. I only want that he and my daughter, Justina, became decent people.

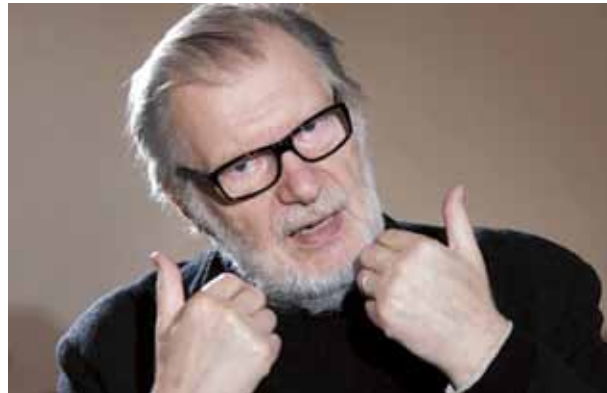
My family is my support, as my parents taught me. I was three years old when war began, and my father and his brother decided to go West. They packed their things and left our native village of Liepynai. However, soon, my father changed his mind and decided to return. His brother, Juozas, went to America. My parents and I endured the slaughter of war, somehow, being placed in carriages for the exiled, which was a favourable destiny for us. Unfortunately, the house in which I was born was destroyed, all traces of the past erased.

PERSONAL DETAILS

Books inspire most of all. What else, besides family, cinema, theatre and photography, warms your soul?

Books. I read a great deal. Books are like people, meeting new faces. I can talk to Jean-Paul Sartre, or to Roland Barthes or Thomas Mann, or Samuel Barclay Beckett; I recently acted in a play by Beckett, in Minsk.

Belarus is the closest neighbour of Lithuania, and we share similar landscapes. I like to be outside, to photograph nature. Whether peo-



Juozas Budraitis in faces

ple like my photos is another question. When you view nature through a lens, you peer into the clouds, into the branches of trees. You touch nature, and converse with it. I can admire nature indefinitely.

What brings you happiness?

Some say that there is no happiness, only states of

elation. For one, happiness may be a drink of water in the Sahara; for another, it may be a new BMW car. You cannot purchase happiness. Where we are elated, we feel inspired. I'm happy when I have a cup of tasty coffee, and when it is possible to publish a book. If the book is interesting to someone, I'm even happier.

Yakub Kolas to please children

By Olga Korneeva

Yakub Kolas National Academic Drama Theatre in Vitebsk stages *The Adventures of Thumbelina* musical, based on famous work by Hans Christian Andersen

For the New Year and Christmas, the Yakub Kolas Theatre presented a wonderful show for younger theatregoers and their parents: *The Adventures of Thumbelina*. The script is the work of playwright Pavel Isaikin, and the show is directed by Mikhail Krasnobayev.

"This is a bright, colourful and truly festive performance that will arouse many wonderful emotions in children and their parents," underlines the literary editor of the theatre, Yuri Ivanovsky. "It's the story of a tiny, sensitive girl, who finds herself in a huge world, facing rudeness and stubborn behaviour. Of course, love and kindness win out, and the courageous King of Butterflies and his friends help save Thumbelina from her troubles."

Unrivalled Angelina

By Olga Korneeva

Young Belarusian Angelina Vasilevskaya wins prestigious Euro Pop Contest Grand Prix *Berliner Perle*

StudioPlay, where Angelina studies, tells us that it's the first time in over fifteen years that a representative of Belarus has won the *Berliner Perle* Euro Pop Contest Grand Prix. Last year, the contest brought together forty-one finalists, from fifteen countries: Malta, Ukraine, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, the Philippines, Germany, the UK, Romania, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Sweden.

Berliner Perle is an official partner of MTV Berlin in the CIS and Baltic States. Angelina gained her place at the contest following a national selection round, held in Minsk. In the finals, entrants performed two songs, in one of three age categories: 10-13, 14-17 and 18-24. After two competition days, Angelina led the 14-17 age category, receiving her medal, cup and precious prize.

The international jury included representatives of culture, producers and composers: from France, the UK and Germany.

Angelina studies at Minsk's gymnasium #11 and is a scholarship holder of the Presidential Special Fund to Support Talented Youth. She has won Republican and international competitions and, in 2015, became a laureate of the *Young Talents of Belarus* contest and a finalist in the national selection round for *Junior Eurovision*. In 2016, she took the Grand Prix at the Republican *Art-Talent* contest.

This tournament offers breathtaking ice hockey as always

The ice hockey team of the President of Belarus has, for the tenth time, won the Christmas International Amateur Ice Hockey Tournament for the Prize of the President of Belarus, with the hosts beating Finland in the finals at Chizhovka-Arena 7:3 (2:0, 3:1, 2:2)

By Semen Bondarev

In the decisive match of the competition, held in Minsk for the 13th time, the hosts managed to open the score in the 7th minute of the first period. Receiving Andrey Glebov's pass, Andrey Mikhalev managed to outplay the Finnish goalkeeper to make the score 1:0. At the end of the first period the Belarusians had dominated and this was capitalised on by Maxim Slysh who brought the score to 2:0.

In the second period, Yaroslav Chupris delivered the puck in the 27th minute. Less than 3 minutes later, Belarus managed a quick counterattack, successfully finished by Konstantin Koltsov to make the score 4:0. Then our rivals from Finland violated the rules, enabling Andrey Glebov to put the fifth puck in their net. Before the break, the rivals managed to score



Full house in the stands



Silver goes to Finland

once, thanks to Riku Hahl.

The third period saw the most action, with the guests scoring twice but failing to equalise. Andrey Astashevich, one of the attackers of the Belarus team, scored twice, putting the final figures on the scoreboard of



Tournament winners' cup claimed by the President of Belarus' team



Bright moments of the Christmas tournament

7:3. Daniel Korso (Belarus) and Aki Usikartano (Finland) were recognized as the best players of the match. It was the second time Finnish hockey players have played in the finals of the Christmas International Amateur Ice Hockey Tournament for the President's Prize; in 2016, they lost to Belarus 1:2. Previously, the squad had claimed bronze on six occasions.

The organizers also named the best players of the whole tournament, with Alexander Petrov (UAE) recognised as the best goalie, Alexander Makritsky (Belarus) as best defender, Andrey Astashevich (Belarus) best forward while Toni Mäkiäho was acknowledged

as the premier striker of the Christmas International Amateur Ice Hockey Tournament. The squad of the United Arab Emirates took bronze, defeating Slovakia on January 7th – 4:3.

Friendship and the festive atmosphere at the Christmas Tournament have always been more important than goals, and the recent rivals were good friends outside the sporting

arenas. From the beginning of the Christmas Tradition charity there have been plenty wishing to take part in it. The teams not only to support the organizers but have also begun to show initiative. This year, the Slovaks were the cheerleaders. While their colleagues were packing sweets into favour bags, Jülius Šupler's team brought a small taste of hockey to children from Molodechno boarding school with air hockey and table football.

It's no accident that the President of Belarus reminded us that the Christmas ice hockey tournaments, which have become traditional, are loved by people not only because of the sport. "Hockey enjoys a special place in our country while guests to the capital are assured of our hospitality and get acquainted with Belarus, its history and culture, while setting up new contacts, since sport is best form of diplomacy."

Conquering Swedish championship at 18

Belarus-born Yulia Markevich becomes Swedish hockey goalkeeper at the age of 18

By Kirill Karin

Young Yulia currently plays for the Swedish ice hockey team Färjestads from Karlstad, who are in the elite series — the highest division of the championship. The team has been Swedish champions nine times.

Yulia described how, when she was five years old, she moved to the Swedish town of Eskilstuna with her parents. She practiced figure skating at the local Linden club for two years. However, when she was eight she watched hockey players and decided to try the game. The young athlete admits



Yulia Markevich making a career in hockey

that her success is partly due to her father's genes, since in Belarus he often practised ice hockey.

In Eskilstuna there was a team of girls aged 5 to 10. At first, she played in attack and later became a goal keeper. Yulia says that in Sweden girls are allowed to play

with the boys and for some time she was the goal keeper in the boys' team.

"At first, it was unusual to be in the locker room together with boys but eventually they just accepted me as one of them." Alongside playing ice hockey, Yulia currently studies economics at a gymnasium in the city of Leksand. She chose to study in Leksand mainly because of the hockey, as there's a good club there. She plans to finish her studies and to continue training there but will go to Karlstad where the Färjestads squad is based.

Sport facilities 100 percent ready

By Alexey Grishin

According to the Sports Director of the European Olympic Committees (EOC), Pierce O'Callaghan, who attended Minsk on a three-day inspection visit, the sports facilities of the Belarusian capital are ready to host the 2nd European Games in 2019

During his visit he has been to the Sports Palace, Chizhovka-Arena Sport Complex, a shooting range named after Timoshenko and a rowing canal in Zaslavl. These are the



Pierce O'Callaghan

sites that are to be used during the Games.

"The visit to Minsk is historic, as the inspection begins the preparation for 2019 European Games. Over three days in Minsk we've managed to see all the sports facilities that will be used during the competitions. I can say with confidence that the Minsk sports facilities are 100 percent ready to host the Second Summer European Games," noted Mr. O'Callaghan.

"During the visit we've been to several high quality hotels. These facilities meet all the requirements to welcome VIP guests of whom there will be many in 2019. I was also impressed with the Student Village where there is every facility for the participants of the competitions," he added.

Festivities of the week

Golden Ring of Vitebsk 'Dvina' Cultural and Historical Complex hosts folk Christmas festivities, *Vitebsk Kolyady* or *Kolyady in the Dvina River Area*

EXHIBITIONS

NATIONAL ART MUSEUM

20 Lenin Street

Until 23rd January. Exhibition of Yuri Karachun's works Until 30th January. *Celestial World on the Earth* Until 5th February. *Russian Pictorial Art of 19th-20th Century*

NATIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF BELARUS

12 Karl Marx Street

Until 15th January. *Time of Silent Stars: from Black-and-White to Red* Until 29th January. *Belarusian Trade in History* Until 29th January. *Day of the Past — Day of the Present* Until 28th February. *Time of Miracles: Winter Holidays and Entertainments* Until 1st June 2017. *From Romanian Dinary to Belarusian Rouble*

EXHIBITION HALL OF BELARUSIAN NATURE AND ECOLOGY MUSEUM

9A Bogdanovich Street

Until 13th March. *Noisy Feathered Rainbow*

MUSEUM OF BELARUSIAN NATURE AND ECOLOGY

12 Karl Marx Street

Until 22nd January. Exhibition of carnivorous plants

LEONID SHCHEMELEV CITY ART GALLERY

10 Revolyutsionnaya Street

Until 29th January. *Robo Art*

MIKHAIL SAVITSKY'S ART GALLERY

15 Svobody Square

Until 5th February. *From Lisbon to Vladivostok through Minsk*

ARENA CITY

84 Pobediteley Avenue

Until 1st February. *IllyuzIum* interactive entertaining exhibition of illusions and 3D pictures

OUTLET

44 Zhukov Avenue

Until 31st January. *Hidden Reality* Until 31st January. *Quintessence: To See the Unseen* show-exhibition

YAKUB KOLAS STATE LITERARY MUSEUM

5 Akademicheskaya Street

Until 30th September 2017. *In Waves of Endless Movement: Along Kolas' Automobile Paths*

MUSEUM OF THEATRICAL AND MUSICAL CULTURE HISTORY

5 Muzykalny Lane

Until 15th January. *Old Chest and Beautiful New Year Fir Tree* Until 22nd January. *Kalyady Pictures — 2016*

SPORTS PALACE SQUARE

4 Pobediteley Avenue

Until 15th January. *Minsk Christmas Festival*

THEATRES

BELARUSIAN STATE ACADEMIC MUSICAL THEATRE

44 Myasnikov Street

13.01. *The Bat* 14.01. *The Clandestine Marriage (Duke Luxembourg)* 15.01. *Wedding in Malinovka* 17.01. *Blue Cameo* 18.01. *Ball in Savoy* 19.01. *The Swan Lake*

YANKA KUPALA NATIONAL ACADEMIC THEATRE

7 Engels Street

12.01. *ZhArt to You* 13.01. *Kolyady Night* 14.01. *Seagull* 15.01. *Two Souls* 17.01. *Pan Tadeush* 18.01. *Pinsk Gentry* 19.01. *People of the Marshes*

MAXIM GORKY NATIONAL ACADEMIC DRAMA THEATRE

5 Volodarsy Street

12.01. *Singer* 13.01. *An Ideal Husband* 14.01. *Efir* 15.01. *Double Eternity* 17.01. *The Twelfth Night* 18.01. *Testosterone* 19.01. *Pane Kokhanku*

CONCERTS

MINSK TRACTOR WORKS' HOUSE OF CULTURE

24 Dolgobrodskaya Street

13.01. *Bely Ptakh Ensemble*

UPPER TOWN

23A Svobody Square

13.01. *Strauss as an Encore* 17.01. *Ave Maria concert programme*

THEATRE-STUDIO OF CINEMA ACTORS

13 Pobediteley Avenue

12 and 13.01. *Even a Wise Man Stumbles* 14.01. *My Dear* 15 and 17.01. *Nobody Ever Said Life Would Be Easy* 18 and 19.01. *Battlefield*

REPUBLICAN THEATRE OF BELARUSIAN DRAMA

44 Kropotkin Street

12.01. *Mister Joke* 13.01. *Adam's Jokes* 14.01. *Adel* 17.01. *Portrait* 18.01. *Grandfather*

BELARUSIAN REPUBLICAN YOUNG SPECTATOR'S THEATRE

26 Engels Street

12.01. *An Intimidated Apostle* 13.01. *Savage Hunt of King Stakh* 14.01. *Cat's House* 15.01. *My Little Miracle Maker* 18.01. *Little Tenderness*

BELARUSIAN STATE PHILHARMONIC

50 Nezavisimosti Avenue

12.01. *Pesnyary* Belarusian State Ensemble in concert to celebrate Vladimir Mulyavin's birthday 13.01. *Christmas and New Year Music: Belarusian Air Force Big Band* led by Dmitry Naumovich 14.01. *Christmas Lights Souls; Old New Year in*